**The Five Ages of Man**

Hesiod was a Boeotian farmer until the day he met the muses while he was tending sheep. The muses were the 9 daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne [Memory] who inspired poets, speakers, and artists. By convention, they were invoked at the beginning of an epic poem. The muses inspired Hesiod to write the 800-line epic poem called *Works and Days*. In it, Hesiod tells a Greek creation story that traces the lineage of mankind through 5 successive "ages" or "races" from the "Golden Age" to the present "Iron Age."

The Golden Age was a mythical first period of man when everything was happy and easy, and mortals lived like gods, although they died, but only as if falling asleep. No one worked or grew unhappy. Spring never ended. It is even described as a period in which people aged backwards. When they died, they became daimons (from which Philip Pullman gets his "daemon" and others get the word demon) and roamed the earth. The people of the Golden Age were formed by or for the Titan Cronos, whom the Romans called Saturn. When Zeus overcame the Titans, the Golden Age ended.

*First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.   
But after earth had covered this generation -- they are called pure spirits dwelling on the earth, and are kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men; for they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgments and cruel deeds, givers of wealth; for this royal right also they received....*

Hesiod *Works and Days*

During the Silver Age the Olympian god Zeus was in charge. Zeus caused this generation of man to be created inferior in appearance and wisdom to the last. He divided the year into 4 seasons. Man had to plant grain and seek shelter, but still, a child could play for 100 years before growing up. The people wouldn't honor the gods, so Zeus caused them to be destroyed. When they died, they became "blessed spirits of the underworld."

*Then they who dwell on Olympus made a second generation which was of silver and less noble by far. It was like the golden race neither in body nor in spirit. A child was brought up at his good mother's side a hundred years, an utter simpleton, playing childishly in his own home. But when they were full grown and were come to the full measure of their prime, they lived only a little time in sorrow because of their foolishness, for they could not keep from sinning and from wronging one another, nor would they serve the immortals, nor sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed ones as it is right for men to do wherever they dwell. Then Zeus the son of Cronos was angry and put them away, because they would not give honor to the blessed gods who live on Olympus.   
 But when earth had covered this generation also -- they are called blessed spirits of the underworld by men, and, though they are of second order, yet honor attends them also.*

Hesiod *Works and Days*

The Third Age was of bronze. Zeus created men from ash trees -- a hard wood used in spears. The Bronze Age men were strong and warlike. In fact, war was their purpose and passion. Among other traits, they did not eat bread. Their armor and homes were of bronze. It was this generation of men that was destroyed by the flood in the days of Prometheus' son Deucalion and Pyrrha. When the bronze men died they went to the Underworld (Hades).

*Zeus the Father made a third generation of mortal men, a brazen race, sprung from ash-trees\*, and it was in no way equal to the silver age, but was terrible and strong. They loved the lamentable works of Ares and deeds of violence; they ate no bread, but were hard of heart like adamant, fearful men. Great was their strength and unconquerable the arms which grew from their shoulders on their strong limbs. Their armor was of bronze, and their houses of bronze, and of bronze were their implements: there was no black iron. These were destroyed by their own hands and passed to the dank house of chill Hades, and left no name: terrible though they were, black Death seized them, and they left the bright light of the sun.*

Hesiod *Works and Days*

The Heroic Age was the one before our own. This race of men was called *Henitheoi* and was, like the Bronze race, made by Zeus. The men of this age were more heroic than their predecessors and successors. They were the demigods, but many were destroyed by the great wars of Greek legend. After death, some went to the Underworld; others to the Islands of the Blessed ones, known as Elysium.

*But when earth had covered this generation also, Zeus the son of Cronos made yet another, the fourth, upon the fruitful earth, which was nobler and more righteous, a god-like race of hero-men who are called demi-gods, the race before our own, throughout the boundless earth. Grim war and dread battle destroyed a part of them, some in the land of Cadmus at seven-gated Thebe when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus, and some, when it had brought them in ships over the great sea gulf to Troy for rich-haired Helen's sake: there death's end enshrouded a part of them. But to the others father Zeus the son of Cronos gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling Ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain-giving earth bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year, far from the deathless gods, and Cronos rules over them, for the father of men and gods released him from his bonds. And these last equally have honour and glory.*

Hesiod *Works and Days*

Zeus placed a fifth race of men on earth during the present, Iron Age. Hesiod finds himself in the Iron Age. During this age humans live an existence of toil and misery. Children dishonor their parents, brother fights with brother and the social contract between guest and host (xenia) is forgotten. During this age might make right, and bad men use lies to be thought good. At the height of this age, humans no longer feel shame or indignation at wrongdoing; babies will be born with gray hair and the gods will have completely forsaken humanity: "there will be no help against evil."

*And again far-seeing Zeus made yet another generation, the fifth, of men who are upon the bounteous earth.*

*Thereafter, would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation, but either had died before or been born afterwards. For now truly is a race of iron, and men never rest from labor and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them. But, notwithstanding, even these shall have some good mingled with their evils. And Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men also when they come to have grey hair on the temples at their birth. The father will not agree with his children, nor the children with their father, nor guest with his host, nor comrade with comrade; nor will brother be dear to brother as aforetime. Men will dishonor their parents as they grow quickly old, and will carp at them, chiding them with bitter words, hard-hearted they, not knowing the fear of the gods. They will not repay their aged parents the cost their nurture, for might shall be their right: and one man will sack another's city. There will be no favor for the man who keeps his oath or for the just or for the good; but rather men will praise the evil-doer and his violent dealing. Strength will be right and reverence will cease to be; and the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him, and will swear an oath upon them. Envy, foul-mouthed, delighting in evil, with scowling face, will go along with wretched men one and all. And then Aidos and Nemesis, with their sweet forms wrapped in white robes, will go from the wide-pathed earth and forsake mankind to join the company of the deathless gods: and bitter sorrows will be left for mortal men, and there will be no help against evil.*

Hesiod *Works and Days*

Study Guide for “The 5 Ages of Man”

1. Who inspired Hesiod to write his work *Works and Days?*
2. What is the name of the first age offered by Hesiod?
3. Who was in charge during this age?
4. How did one live within the first age?
5. How did one die within the first age?
6. What did one become after death?
7. What ended the first age?
8. According to Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, what was beyond the reach of mortal men during the first age?
9. What is the name of the second age offered by Hesiod?
10. Who was in charge during this age?
11. How were mortals different in this age as compared to the first?
12. How long could they live as a child during this age?
13. What ended this second age?
14. According to *Works and Days*, why did Zeus “put them away?”
15. What is the name of the third age offered by Hesiod?
16. How were men created in this age?
17. What was the nature of these beings?
18. How were these mortals destroyed?
19. According to *Works and Days*, whose works did they love?
20. What is the name of the forth age offered by Hesiod?
21. What was the Greek name for this race of men?
22. How were they destroyed?
23. According to *Works and Days*, some mortals were killed in battle. However, some of them are still alive. Where did they go, and who rules over them?
24. What is the name of the fifth age offered by Hesiod?
25. How do humans exist in this age?
26. What will happen to babies in this age? What do you think that means?
27. How will the gods react to the mortals of this age?
28. Which age does Hesiod find himself in?
29. According to *Works and Days*, Hesiod compares this age of men to what other age?
30. According to *Works and Days*, which two individuals will forsake mankind and join the gods?